

# MCC Committee on Women's Concerns report



Report #50, July-August 1983

## Ten-Year Celebration of the Committee on Women's Concerns

The first issue of this *Report* was dated August, 1973. This issue is a celebration and a recapitulation of 10 years of *Reports* and 10 years of work by the Mennonite Central Committee Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society (now MCC Committee on Women's Concerns).

I feel privileged to have been asked to coordinate this anniversary issue. Although one could have focused on many issues and on many comparisons between past and present, this *Report* focuses mainly on retracing the development of the committee and reflecting on its contributions during the past 10 years.

Four writers in this issue also take us into the future. Luann Habegger Martin and Dorothy Yoder Nyce, original members of the task force when it began in 1973, list their perceptions of its accomplishments of the past decade and set out some goals for the future. Herta Funk and Katie Funk Wiebe, both deeply involved in their respective conferences (General Conference and Mennonite Brethren) for many years, share their perceptions as well.

More comments were solicited; perhaps others will respond in future issues of the *Report*.—Margaret Loewen Reimer, compiler of this issue and associate editor of *Mennonite Reporter*, Waterloo, Ont.

### In the Beginning...

The MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church and Society (WTF) was born in March 1973 in Ottawa. It was at that spring meeting of MCC Peace Section that a group of four women made a case for including "women's concerns for peace within the area of interest identified in the Guiding Principles of Peace Section."

Their presentation resulted in the following action moved by John Lapp and seconded by Lee Roy Berry: "The Peace Section accepts the challenge to place women's interests on its continuing agenda and supports bringing these concerns to the attention of the church via a variety of forms and offers its resources for such. The Peace Section appoints a subcommittee of the women members of the Section along with Luann Habegger and with Ted Koontz as staff persons to pursue the suggested goals." The motion was carried.

The focus on women's concerns did not arise out of nowhere at that particular meeting. Although the motivation could be traced back to the creation of Eve (or maybe only the Fall), several specific events in the early 1970s could be seen as leading up to the formation of the WTF.

In 1971, MCC Peace Section issued an invitation to women's organizations of constituent conferences to have representatives on Peace Section. Two women—Fern Umble of the Women's Missionary and Service Commission of the Mennonite Church, and Lora Oyer of the General Conference Mennonite Church's Women in Mission—attended the September 1971 Peace Section sessions in Chicago.

In November 1972, a women's caucus met following the Peace Assembly in Chicago sponsored by Peace Section. The women there discussed many issues facing women in the Mennonite church. In that year also, Dorothy Yoder Nyce prepared a paper called "Women in God's Plan and Man's World."

These events became the basis of the presentation of the four women at the Peace Section meeting in March 1973. Fern Umble and Lora Oyer spoke for conference women's groups; Luann Habegger, staff member in MCC's Washington Office, reported on the Peace Assembly caucus; Dorothy Yoder Nyce read her paper.

Things moved quickly after that. By the next Peace Section executive committee meeting in August 1973, the WTF had its name, immediate goals and the first issue of the *Report* ready.

By the November 1973 meeting of Peace Section, two *Reports* had been prepared and plans for a packet of materials and a book of essays were presented. It was also recommended that a Canadian woman be nominated to Peace Section who would automatically become a member of the WTF.

Also in November of that first year, an MCC Peace Assembly on "The Interdependence of Men and Women" was held at Camp Friedenswald in Michigan.

It was certainly a year of beginnings, not only for the WTF but also for women in the two largest constituent conferences. Women from the General Conference met in Elkhart, Indiana in October for a consultation on the role of women in the church. Out of that meeting came a decision to hire a half-time person to focus on this issue; Herta Funk was appointed in September 1974. In the Mennonite Church, the first woman (Emma Richards) was ordained to the ministry in 1973.

### Highlights

The work of the WTF moved forward during the next years. A few of the highlights were:

1974: Produced a packet of 30 articles called "Persons Becoming" which went into four

printings and sold 1,800 copies.

1974: Seminar in Washington, D.C. on the family.

1975: WTF became binational with three Canadian and three U.S. women members.

1975: Polling and analysis of MCC volunteers with recommendations to MCC.

1978: Involvement in planning for Mennonite World Conference in Wichita and promoting of financial aid for women from developing countries.

1978: *Resource Listing of Mennonite Women.*

1980: Publication of *Which Way Women?*, a 150-page book with over 40 contributors.

1982: Proposal to MCC for permanent women's deak. Half-time staff person for women's concerns appointed by Peace Section (U.S.).

1982: WTF becomes Committee on Women's Concerns under Peace Section (U.S.) and Canadian Peace and Social Concerns Committee.—Margaret Loewen Reimer

## Ten Years Later: Luann Habegger Martin

At the spring 1973 meeting of the Peace Section in Ottawa, five women proposed that the status of women in church and society be added to the Peace Section's portfolio.

The Peace Section's agenda was already overloaded with the Vietnam War, the draft, civil rights, the Middle East conflict, and race relations in South Africa. Nevertheless, the five women present at the meeting stated that women's concerns were a matter of justice, thus belonging on the Peace Section's agenda.

We operated out of our homes and communicated primarily through letters and an occasional meeting or phone call. Ted Koontz of the Peace Section office in Akron gave us valuable assistance.

Since the WTF fell under the umbrella of MCC, its activities were open to the entire Mennonite constituency. The WTF was free of any stereotypes of existing women's organizations in the church which might have turned away Mennonites on the fringes of the church. Women who felt isolated in their congregations could find support in the WTF, knowing that they were part of a network of Mennonite feminists across Canada and the United States.

As I reflect on the beginnings of the WTF, I feel a sense of satisfaction with its accomplishments. I believe that the task force acted as a catalyst and played a significant role in bringing the concerns of women to the attention of the constituency and the leadership, particularly the leadership of MCC and the Mennonite

World Conference. Furthermore, the network of feminists it helped to create provided support at a critical moment in the lives of many women.

### Reasons to Celebrate

As the WTF marks its tenth anniversary, there are a number of reasons to celebrate:

1) Ten years ago few women were being considered for leadership roles in the church. Today, women, rather than being categorically dismissed as a candidate, may actually be sought for a position on a church board, committee or staff.

2) Ten years ago women were expected to assume virtually all child care responsibilities. Today the nursery at my home congregation is staffed by men and women.

3) Ten years ago a female seminary student was assumed to be studying in the field of Christian education. In the past ten years a sizeable number of women have received their M.Div. degrees, and some of these have assumed pastorates or teaching assignments in Bible departments in Mennonite colleges. I doubt that my home congregation would accept a woman as pastor, but now women are teaching adult Bible classes. And the remarks of women missionaries are no longer reserved for the children's story hour.

4) Ten years ago we knew little about our foremothers or, for that matter, about each other. Since then, books and articles have been written about Mennonite women. Women's studies are offered on our college campuses. Conferences, retreats, caucuses, support groups,

and newsletters have put us in touch with each other and, I believe, improved our self-image.

These are beginnings, but just beginnings. The Committee on Women's Concerns, as the task force is now called, still has a vital role to play.

### Goals for Next Decade

1) Continue to bring before the church the concerns of those who feel excluded on account of their sex, marital status, race, economic level, etc.

2) Keep tabs of women's representation on boards, etc. Let people know we care and are counting.

3) Support efforts being made to utilize women's gifts (e.g. by furnishing the names of women who could be considered for appointments).

4) Provide the medium through which women can raise issues and share experiences. We need to know how others are coping with the "just a housewife" syndrome or the pressures to be a superwoman.

5) Promote, as Gloria Steinem puts it, "structural change that will make new options possible for most people. For instance: child care and flexible work schedules (for both men and women) to make shared parenthood a practical choice."

6) Mobilize women to work for disarmament.

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## Ten Years Later: Dorothy Yoder Nyce

I am glad to have been one of the early WTF shapers. We were daughters determined to birth an organization that would assist Mennonite organizations and churches to see that justice, or its absence, influences our relationships as women and men.

MCC Peace Section members who met in Ottawa in March 1973 considered seriously and approved a WTF within its structure. I recall questions and support from men like Bill Snyder, Atlee Beechy, Bill Keeney and Luke Stoltzfus.

I recall our "rehearsal" session prior to presenting the proposal. Fern Umble, who was finishing her WMSC responsibilities on Peace Section, genuinely hoped the fetus would emerge on solid footing. Several of us made presentations. Ruth C. Stoltzfus and Lora Oyer helped shape goals and projects.

Ted Koontz, the Section's reliable executive secretary, served well as our communication link with the "parent" organization. Luann Habegger (Martin) demonstrated her solid administrative skills. I had the opportunity to present the WTF to the next MCC annual meeting, held in Winnipeg. We were duly "christened."

MCC is to be commended for its vision. A significant strength of the WTF is its inter-Mennonite, duo-nation representation. In order to truly disperse opportunity, we soon decided that members would function for only three years, and that chairing duties would also rotate. We began with a \$1,000 budget.

Ten years ago opposition to the WTF's efforts often stemmed from biblical principle, prejudice, and/or personal interest.

Hopefully during the next decade, resistance to women's full participation in church and society will break down as people receive spiritual counseling and inspiration from women, see women skillfully administer church programs, and witness the vitality of relationships built upon mutuality rather than hierarchy.—*Luann Habegger Martin was the first editor of the Task Force Report. She lives with her husband and two children in Cameroon, Central Africa and is, to her knowledge, the only Mennonite woman in the country.*

### Editor's Postscript

In her cover letter with this article, Martin states: Writing the article was a good exercise because it prompted me to look back at that era in my life. I doubt if any ten-year period will be as eventful for me personally as the past one (a year at seminary, master's degree in international development, marriage, two children (the most revolutionary change!), 2½ years in Ghana and now ½ years in Cameroon.

"I shouldn't expect institutions to change as rapidly in such a short period. I find it ironic that as part of a women's organization in the Presbyterian Church here in Yaounde, I am being requested to cover my head in church. Being GC, the head covering was never an issue for me. So in some ways it appears I'm working backwards on the issues!"

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Our initial efforts focused on education. A quarterly newsletter/*Report* offered "a forum for ideas and resource materials, publicized and affirmed Mennonite women's creative efforts in church and society, and alerted readers to leadership positions." I would thank Gayle Gerber Koontz and Muriel Thiessen Stackley for upgrading this resource during the decade.

During the first two years we also assisted MCC in forming an Advisory Committee to study MCC women personnel, prepared a packet of 30 articles (*Persons Becoming*), established contacts with other Mennonite institutions, and welcomed the first Canadian members.

### Growing Pains

The organization experienced growing pains too. A prominent churchman asked me, "Why should MCC mix peace efforts and women?"

The October 27-28, 1973 minutes reported, "Only one negative response has come from our readers." But a January 31, 1979 note said, "Kindly discontinue sending the *Report*.... It disturbs me that my contributions to MCC are a part of this unnecessary spending, whereas money could be used to alleviate suffering." The woman did not recognize that alleviating the suffering of discrimination was central to our endeavors.

At times I held my breath. A few WTF members through the years lacked background and vision for the

tasks presenting themselves. Resistance from Mennonite World Conference officials prior to Wichita had to be processed, and suggestions from the WTF were compromised. And moving the "office" to Canada still seems to me premature.

But I am personally grateful for all the volunteer time that has been given to WTF activity; for financial contributions through the decade; for solid, stabilizing support from readers of WTF materials.

Planning and editing *Which Way Women?* was my special privilege. From those who wrote their thanks, I

know it encouraged and energized many Mennonite women. (Knowing how helpful Linda Schmidt was during that project, I appreciate the fact that she is back in the Akron office, facilitating current CWC efforts.)

Few lives are completed after ten years. The same holds for organizations committed to bringing about a more just world for all God's creatures. May those who will provide leadership in the next decade be radically visionary!—*Dorothy Yoder Nyce, Goshen, IN.*

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## Ten Years Later: Herta Funk

What has happened to women in the General Conference Mennonite Church during the past ten years?

1) In 1973 biblical interpretation was one of the big issues. The flood of books dealing with the biblical material which deluged the market in the early seventies has become a trickle. The search has moved beyond the biblical material.

2) In 1973 another big issue was representation in church structures. As I analyzed the GC data I realized that the increase in women's representation in church structures coincides with the emergence of the women's movement.

For instance, in 1970-71 there was only one woman on the Commission on Overseas Mission and there were two women on the Commission on Education. Representation in top GC and Canadian conference structures increased from 11% in 1972-73 to 30% in 1982-83. However, only 29% of the nominees to Bethlehem '83 are women.

3) In 1973 there was little written about Mennonite women in history, aside from the stories in the *Martyrs Mirror* and a brief article by H.S. Bender in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. During the last decade a small body of literature has emerged (*Full Circle*, *Women Among the Brethren*, *Women in Search of Mission*, and *Mennonite Women*) and more is coming.

4) In the early seventies Women in Mission was evaluating its programs and did much necessary updating. Since then WM, with its million dollars of contributions in money and material aid, has moved from the regularly forgotten "auxiliary" in the minds of some people to the point where its coordinator, Joan Wiebe, now regularly meets with the executive secretaries in the General Conference offices.

5) In the early seventies questions were beginning to be raised on how women volunteers were treated in Mennonite service agencies, as well as on how women's needs were included in program planning. Progress is slow on both fronts. At least some progress is being made in bringing women from so-called developing countries to Mennonite World Conference.

6) In 1973 there were no ordained women in the General Conference, as far as I can recall. In 1983 there

are two dozen women listed in the GC *Handbook of Information*. However, only four are sole ministers in their churches.

### Trends for the 1980's

1) There seems to be a conservative mood making itself known in the General Conference (perhaps part of a larger conservative swing), which sometimes surfaces in resolutions on conference floors against women's ordination and in writing against inclusive language.

2) Some of the women who have struggled hard to become actively involved in pastoral ministry feel a quiet despair when, after they have proved their ability to minister, they continue to be challenged on the basis of their sex. Some feel the battles they fought ten years ago have to be fought all over again.

3) There are women in ministry (in its broadest definition) who have, so to speak, "made it." Some fall into the trap of then protecting their gains by avoiding further challenge to the church. Others gladly share in the gains fought for by others, but they themselves avoid the fray.

4) In the eighties discrimination against women will be much more subtle than it was during the seventies. Consequently women will often continue to feel utterly powerless to effect change. One woman told me: "Women are not depressed because they don't know enough, but because they know too much."

5) Women will need to develop their own leadership styles. The "corporate model," although somewhat modified by theological considerations, still does violence to people. Women, the keepers of the network (see Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*), are in a unique position to develop a different style, which is conducive to community, rather than to competition.

6) The network of women's groups will continue to expand. The official women's organizations reach only about a third of Mennonite women. There will be continued need to be in touch with this vast network, not giving in to talk of an easy united front for all women.

7) Concerns about the inclusion of women in theology, language, research in the social sciences, studies of

history, the ministry, and church structures will need to continue in the eighties.

One Mennonite woman indicated to me that the General Conference has been more open to using her gifts than other Mennonite organizations with which she has been associated. However, it seems that only constant vigilance will preserve the gains which Mennonite women have made and assure additional gains.  
—Herta Funk, Newton, KS.

## Ten Years Later: Katie Funk Wiebe

Over the Thanksgiving weekend of 1974, I went with some apprehension into the acknowledged world of the feminists by attending the Evangelical Women's Caucus in Washington, D.C. I didn't realize I was probably a closet feminist. I knew that for many people the word "feminist" was pejorative. Attaching "evangelical" or "biblical" didn't make it easier for some to accept.

The stereotype of a feminist then was a raging, hostile, aggressive, anti-male woman with lesbian, pro-abortion attitudes. To my relief I found the stereotype didn't hold at that first caucus. I encountered only a group of calm, level-headed women (and a sprinkling of men) prepared to study the biblical base for Christian feminism and the historical record regarding women's roles, and to reaffirm and explore gifts and lifestyle for all women, including singles.

That conference identified for me women in the Mennonite churches who held some of the same values as I did. About thirty Mennos met for breakfast one morning. We looked at each other and knew we shared a vague hurt—often unarticulated even to ourselves.

The WTF has attempted to speed the process of focusing issues and working toward their solution. While the goals haven't always been neat and well-trimmed around the edges, the basic question has been: what is woman's place in the Mennonite churches?

### Pattern of Access

Barbara Brown Zikmund in *Women of the Cloth* (Harper) notes a general pattern of access of women to full participation in the church:

- 1) Right of women to speak about matters of faith in the public realm, particularly in groups that include men.
- 2) Right of women to be elected and to take leadership positions in local churches.
- 3) Female representation in upper levels of church organizations, in conventions, on boards and the like.
- 4) Women seeking to be recognized as valid pastoral leaders in the churches, without raising the question of ordination.
- 5) Ordination, rather than just licensing.

6) The right to compete with men to serve the church in all ways open to men, including senior leadership in "leading congregations" and positions of denominational leadership reserved for the ordained (such as bishop, conference minister, presbytery executive, and the like).

7) To work as theologians—the right of women to think differently about the Christian faith itself.

### Where Are We?

Women today teach Bible classes, write curriculum materials and speak at gatherings at which both men and women are present. Women are being acknowledged, considered and occasionally appointed or elected for tasks and positions heretofore not considered their domain, such as worship leader, elder, moderator, and so forth. Yet there are other visible trends:

1) There is a general strengthening of all women's structures, both formal and informal. Sometimes it's an attempt to hang onto at least one power base within the church; at other times it's a byproduct of today's trend to enhance the concept of sisterhood. I see this bonding taking place in women's church organizations, retreats, rallies, Bible and prayer groups, homemakers' groups, professional women's groups, and so forth.

2) More younger women are becoming aware of feminist issues and are not as hesitant to move in as we older women were. Also, more men are seeing that changes in women's roles affect them and together with their wives are willing to find new kinds of marriage partnerships.

3) More women are willing and ready to consider leadership positions. The Women in Ministry conferences and the resource of listing women have helped this.

4) More women are attending seminary and finding in the study of theology a satisfying way to work through their own inner conflicts and a resource for helping others.

5) We are becoming more historically aware, given the publication of biographies of women and/or histories of women's activities in some branches of our Mennonite churches.

So, we've seen a consolidation of goals over the past ten years, and much necessary clearing away of brush. Yet much still needs to be done.

### Tasks Still To Be Done

1) Women need to be encouraged to shift from thinking about themselves and their own needs to considering others' needs, particularly minority women, Third World women, and the poor and oppressed among us. The temptation will always be to think that when a few women have arrived, all have arrived. We've only just begun.

2) We need to continue the networking begun within the Mennonite constituency and extend it to other

Christian groups. Sisterhood is bigger than Mennonite women.

3) Stories are still emerging of women who have been bruised when they've become part of church bureaucracies, and move on. We need to become better burden-bearers and not merely congratulate when a woman achieves in a dominantly male area.

We need to encourage all women in leadership in all areas, even the token women. Too often, when the issue is top leadership (such as pastor, conference minister, executive secretary, denomination organ editor, etc.) there is still a reluctance to risk with women.

4) We need to do even more in historical and sociological research regarding women in the Mennonite churches.

5) Women need to be encouraged to speak and write as theologians and biblical scholars on all issues, not just those affecting women.

6) Women need to be encouraged to resist pabulum in study materials for groups and personal reading, and to reach for that which will stretch their minds and spirits.

7) The issues of ordination and sexist language will not soon go away.

8) Help for the one-parent family and two-job family should not be omitted. Let's also add the two-parent family.

In our Mennonite churches, we've taught the servanthood and priesthood of all believers. We have a natural base with which to begin the second ten years. One decade is too short a time to measure progress or to indicate defeat. The only way is ahead.—*Katie Funk Wiebe, Hillsboro, KS.*

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## Task Force Reviews

The Task Force on Women in Church and Society, called into being by MCC Peace Section in 1973, had several peculiarities about it.

From the start, it was perceived to be a subcommittee of Peace Section and was initially made up of female members of the Section. The agenda thus overlapped with Peace Section, and rightly so, for injustices to women should be part of a peacemaking agenda.

But the WTF's concerns were also specific and momentous enough to warrant a separate committee. Gradually the task force assumed its own direction and identity and members no longer overlapped with the Peace Section membership. Thus the task force was both a subcommittee and an entity entirely separate from its parent body.

Another peculiarity was the task itself. A task force is called to a particular task, and when that is done, the group is disbanded. But when is the task of dealing with women's concerns complete? How long can a task force continue and still call itself a task force?

Another peculiarity of this group was its lack of a programming capacity. With a small budget, the group saw itself as an initiator, a coordinator, and an inspiration to agencies and conferences which can carry out program. Was its task complete when conferences had had their consciousness raised and had begun to work at the issues?

These are some of the questions which have faced the WTF over the years. In order to deal with them, a committee was set up in 1980 to evaluate the task force. Two options were discussed: 1) to form a more permanent committee on women somewhere within MCC, or 2) to split the task force into separate U.S. and Canadian committees. Both were rejected in favor of continuing the existing structure for another four years.

The review did encourage the MCC Peace Section (U.S.) and the Canadian Peace and Social Concerns Committee to work more closely with the WTF.

Because of the inconclusive nature of this review, another review process was initiated in 1981. This review recommended that the WTF become a permanent Committee on Women's Concerns (CWC) under the auspices of the Canadian and U.S. peace committees.

It also recommended that a firm link between the CWC and its parent bodies be maintained for the benefit of both. The CWC was urged to see itself more as a coordinating body with opportunity to submit proposals to the peace committees for specific projects.

So the former task force is now functioning as the Committee on Women's Concerns. A few problems of its relationship to its parent bodies still need to be ironed out, at least on the Canadian side.—*Margaret Loewen Reimer*

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### From Report #1, August, 1973

"Periodically you will be receiving reports from the Task Force. These reports are *not* intended to negate the contributions of women in church and society, alienate women from men, or replace male power structures with female power structures. Instead, the Task Force hopes the mailings will 1) provide a forum for sharing concerns, ideas and resource materials (articles, bib-

liographies, media suggestions, book reviews, etc.); 2) make visible and affirm efforts being made by women to create a more whole, inclusive church and society; and 3) alert readers to available leadership positions.

"This first report is of a more general nature, sketching the role of women in the Church and highlighting some of the more recent developments."

## Members of the Task Force/Committee on Women's Concerns

1973-74:	Ruth Stoltzfus, Lois Keeney, Lora Oyer, Dorothy Yoder Nyce, Luann Habegger, Ted Koontz. (Luann Habegger, <i>Report</i> editor)
1975:	Erna Klassen, Sue Clemmer Steiner, Margaret Loewen Reimer, Dorothy Yoder Nyce, Luann Habegger, Katie Funk Wiebe. (Steiner/Reimer, <i>Report</i> editors)
1976:	Erna Klassen, Gayle Gerber Koontz, Emma LaRoque, Katie Funk Wiebe, Luann Habegger, Margaret Loewen Reimer.
1977:	Erna Klassen, Katie Funk Wiebe, Nancy S. Lapp, Gayle Gerber Koontz, Mabel Paetkau, Anna Mary Brubacher. (Koontz, <i>Report</i> editor)
1978:	Nancy S. Lapp, Mabel Paetkau, Mary Dueck, Anna Mary Brubacher, Gayle Gerber Koontz, Anita Buller.
1979:	Anna Mary Brubacher, Anita Buller, Nancy S. Lapp, Mary Dueck, Rosie Epp, Edith Krause.
1980:	Elsa Redekop, Rosie Epp, Edith Krause, Mary Dueck, Bertha Beachy, Marth Smith Good. (Muriel Thiessen Stackley, <i>Report</i> editor)
1981:	Bertha Beachy, Rosie Epp, Martha Smith Good, Edith Krause, Karen Neufeld, Esther Wiens.
1982:	Bertha Beachy, Jan Lugibihl, Martha Smith Good, Esther Wiens, Karen Neufeld, Janice Kreider.
1983:	Arlene Miller, Joyce Rutt Eby, Jan Lugibihl, Chris Derstine, Esther Wiens, Karen Neufeld, Janice Krieder. (Sue C. Steiner, <i>Report</i> editor)

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## Reflections and Comments

### #1—Lora Oyer

In response to the invitation from MCC Peace Section for women's organizations of constituent conferences to have a representative on Peace Section, members from two groups (WMSC—Fern Umble, WM—myself), attended the September 1971 sessions in Chicago.

Peace Section members warmly welcomed Fern and me, indicating they felt that women could add a new dimension to the involvements of Peace Section; also, that women were more responsive to information coming to them through our own publications and this would be an asset in consciousness-raising about various issues.

WM welcomed this opportunity to relate more directly to the growing social concerns surrounding us in the U.S. and Canada, recognizing the role of women as peacemakers within the home, church and community and their unique position as conservers of life. Fern Umble was a great person with whom to work and deserves credit for her contribution to the "women's issue." She died of cancer several years ago.

Attending the Women's Caucus following the MCC Peace Section-sponsored Peace Assembly in November 1972 made a deep impression on me. These predominantly young women were our "Mennonite daughters and granddaughters," a dedicated, concerned group of mothers and singles who wanted to relate to other Christian women and wanted opportunity for involvement as an integral part of the total church.

I continue to appreciate the publications and work of the Committee on Women's Concerns.—*Lora Oyer, Chenoa, Illinois.*

### #2—Erna Klassen

I must admit that I am considerably more pessimistic today than I was ten years ago. Ten years ago I thought any woman that showed she was willing to work hard and was capable, would be accepted. Not anymore! The politics of church work have disillusioned me considerably!

For instance, about two years ago a history of the Mennonite Conference in Alberta was published. Recognition is given to the time when, in the late sixties, lay men were elected to the executive of the conference, replacing the longstanding custom of electing only ordained ministers to these positions. Nary a word is found anywhere in the text recording when women were first elected. I refuse to buy a copy of the book! But for the time being that is about all I can do.

Well, enough of my pessimism.

The WTF has been successful in consciousness-raising. Today a considerably larger number of women are working at all levels of the church than they did, or were able to, ten years ago. In that sense, our efforts have been successful.

We were wildly optimistic after our initial successes, thinking we would be fully accepted once we proved ourselves as capable, forgetting that history has always taught us that those people in positions of strength do not voluntarily relinquish those positions. As we move through the 80's, we realize that we will need to become more politicized in our strategies. We have not become as involved in the mediation process as at least some members of the Peace Section hoped we would some years ago.

The real action of the WTF has always been south of the border. The Canadian members have usually travelled south where the meetings and the action were. Our main task in Canada is still consciousness-raising.—*Erna Klassen, Edmonton, Alberta*

### **#3—John A. Lapp**

Even though I have not been close to the WTF for several years, I strongly believe it has been an important ingredient in changing patterns and attitudes during the past ten years.

I doubt very much that any of us in Peace Section had any idea what was being started in March 1973. We perceived an issue; indeed it was put on our agenda. We tried to make a churchly response.

I see the WTF as having played a leadership role. It did this by getting women from several Mennonite groups and regions acquainted with each other, by providing forums for the creation of a consciousness, by promoting the involvement of women at every level of church life.

The task has only begun. Far too many men and indeed some women do not yet recognize that in the church there is "neither male nor female." I'd encourage continuation of the Committee on Women's Concerns to highlight a continuing concern, while always assuming the stance of being part of a larger whole.—*John A. Lapp, Goshen, Indiana.*

### **#4—Anna Mary Brubacher**

The WTF initially made MCC and the larger church aware that few women served on any boards, major committees, or in administrative positions. Because of its influence, the church is recognizing women's gifts in leadership and administration.

Perhaps two of its most significant contributions are the Resource Listing (church agency and boards, and the graduate degree listing) and the *Report*, a forum for discussing women's issues.

My personal opinion is that the WTF has served its purpose. Church agencies and boards are more aware of women's gifts. Ad hoc committees such as Women in Ministry and Womensage have formed to address significant issues and probably will continue to develop where needs arise. Here in Ontario, the Adult Studies programs at Conrad Grebel College have frequently addressed women's issues.

The *Report* continues to address specific women's issues and could become an independent periodical apart from MCC. At present it is not very visible to the larger church.

Canadians became members of the WTF in 1975. Canadian women have benefited from this membership in that the scope of issues has been universal. The WTF has been a place where Canadian agenda could be brought to the larger constituency. However, the *Report* has not always made the Canadian scene visible, either in articles or in the resources listed following the

articles. Having a Canadian editor now has changed that.

While serving on the WTF I became aware of very gifted women in the church. I personally have had many opportunities to use my gifts in the larger church and in the church schools where I've taught. But the WTF has made me aware of the tremendous pain and hurt other women experienced in different settings and conferences.

While on the WTF, I was alerted to many other denominational and feminist periodicals and books that have enriched my reading and thinking.—*Anna Mary Brubacher, Kitchener, Ont.*

### **#5—Lois Keeney**

I was indeed one of the original members of the WTF—much to my surprise at the time. This came about for me through a rather long series of events. I remember well the steps leading up to the appointment. Unfortunately, I do not remember well the meetings or activities of the WTF. As I recall, my time on it was brief and I have not kept in very close touch with its activities since then.—*Lois Keeney, Akron, Pa.*

### **#6—Martha Smith Good**

I'm not sure why the Committee on Women's Concerns exists. Although I enjoyed my time on it, I'm not sure what we were supposed to be doing. At the last meeting [April, 1983] I was disappointed that we spent most of our time on structure—discussing where we fit into the larger MCC structure.

The committee needs to assess its purpose. There are now so many groups working on the same goals, I'm wondering whether the MCC committee shouldn't disband. To disband would not mean we no longer support the cause—we would still work at the issues in our own community.

Canadian members need to check out their involvement on the committee. Our issues are somewhat different, and yet also the same. But in Canada, for example, issues for B.C. women are different than those for Ontario women. It would be more productive to have more localized activity. It makes more sense for me to be directly involved in the local scene here in Ontario, even on an inter-denominational level.—*Martha Smith Good, New Hamburg, Ont.*

### **#7—Mabel Paetkau**

The WTF has given an "official" voice to speak to the inequalities of women in church and society, rather than having those who speak out being labelled neurotic women or radical feminists.

Those most interested in the WTF, its newsletters and work, were given information, alternatives and incentive to work at change in churches, institutions, work, home or wherever.

On the Canadian scene more women are sitting on committees in churches and organizations, but it is

token and executives in many cases still announce, "We have one woman on our board." As long as introductions include such statements of achievement, we still have a long way to go. She obviously is still not fully one of the group.

Probably we as individual WTF members should have worked harder in grassroots education in our constituencies.

I wonder if the WTF is visible enough in its education program. Surely information, attitudes and trends filter down to congregations in time, and I believe Canadian women in some areas have certainly benefited from the work of the WTF. As part of the greater Mennonite organization, Canadians must be included on the Committee on Womens Concerns.

It has sensitized our national organizations, and in Canada has been very beneficial. Women are holding positions that were unheard of ten years ago.

As a former WTF member, it has been a very positive experience for me to work with very capable Mennonite women. It also gave me occasion to do more reading and observation on the involved issues. It has given me an outlet to be more vocal regarding inequities and change.—*Mabel Paetkau, Clearbrook, B.C.*

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## The Task Force Report

The bi-monthly *Report* has been one of the key endeavors undertaken by the WTF. From the first simple, photocopied issue in August 1973, the *Report* has communicated a broad range of women's concerns and issues to a network of people across North America and beyond.

Luann Habegger (Martin) produced the first several issues almost singlehandedly. From 1975-77 the *Report* was edited in Ontario by Sue Clemmer Steiner and Margaret Loewen Reimer; from 1977-80 Gayle Gerber Koontz edited it in Boston, Mass. Muriel Thiessen Stackley, from 1980-82, was the first editor to receive some remuneration for her work. Currently the *Report* is edited by Sue Clemmer Steiner of Waterloo, Ont.

Coordination of articles for each *Report* has been undertaken by individual members of the WTF and others. Some of the themes tackled over the years have been women and work, ordination, worship, men, parenthood, language, violence, power, Native Americans and devotional life.

Over 2,000 copies of the *Report* are mailed from MCC headquarters in Akron, Pa. to subscribers in the U.S. (1,625 individuals), Canada (434) and abroad (125).

The first *Report* from the Task Force on Women in Church and Society (August, 1973) featured "A Short Herstory" and a section called "Current Developments." This dealt with "Mennonite happenings", consciousness-raising groups, language, and gender stereotyping in church curricula. There was also a report of "employment and position of women in the church,"

## Postscript on Canadian Participation

As a former member of the WTF and participant in the 1981 review process, I will "grab" this opportunity to make a few personal observations about Canadian participation in the task force.

I must confess a personal disappointment that the vision and energy of the task force founders never found their counterpart in Canada. In my opinion, Canadian members have always been borne along by the enthusiasm, leadership and agenda of the U.S. women. As a result, the task force has gained little visibility in Canada, and no network of Canadian women and their concerns has developed.

This lack of clear direction on the part of the Canadian members has also been reflected in the gradual dwindling of communication between the task force and the Peace and Social Concerns Committee, the parent body of the Canadian half of the task force.

This may appear to be a harsh criticism of task force members, but it actually grows out of a much broader concern. I am convinced that we as Canadian Mennonite women have not seriously tackled the issues on our own ground. There have been gentle nudges from within conference and church women's groups, but the agenda has often been imported and imposed on the Canadian situation.

Perhaps a national, inter-Mennonite forum does not make sense on this side of the border, but I am convinced that stronger ties need to be forged among Mennonite women before we can make a meaningful and consistent contribution to the Mennonite church in Canada.

Many women, including myself, know the frustration of being the only woman on a church committee, of searching for names of women who can make contributions, of trying to identify common agenda for Canadian women.

We owe a large measure of thanks to our U.S. sisters for inviting us to share their concerns. Certainly there is much we have in common. Participating in the task force, if nothing else, has enriched and educated those of us who have served on it.

I am personally convinced, however, that it is time that we wean ourselves from U.S. leadership in order that we might begin to lay a groundwork for dealing with women's concerns in our own context and in our own way. Until we do, we will never muster the enthusiasm or develop the leadership which will bring our concerns into the limelight and enable us to work at them together.—*Margaret Loewen Reimer*

focusing on seminary, ordination, boards and committees and alternative lifestyles. The *Report* concluded with a selected bibliography (ranging from Lois Gunden Clemens' *Woman Liberated* to Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex*) and a review of *The Illusion of Eve* by Sidney Cornelia Callahan.

## News and Verbs

New members of the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns include **Arlene Miller, Elizabethtown, Pa., of the Brethren in Christ Church; Joyce Rutt Eby, Harrisonburg, Va., of the Mennonite Church (U.S.); and Christine Derstine, Kitchener, Ont., of the Mennonite Church (Canada). Bertha Beachy, Goshen, Ind., and Martha Smith Good, New Hamburg, Ont., completed their 3-year terms on the committee this spring.**

The following resolution was presented to the delegates of the Eastern District Conference of the General Conference Mennonite Church on April 20, 1983: "Be it resolved that on the basis of a normal, literal, grammatical, historical interpretation (the interpretation of our fathers) of holy, inspired, inerrant Scripture (1 Timothy 2: 11-14; 3: 1ff), the Eastern District Conference acknowledges the ordination of women as disobedient to the Word of God and the EDC constitution and hereby requests all EDC churches who have ordained women in the past to recall and annul said ordinations immediately." The delegates could not come to a decision and therefore voted to postpone action until 1984.

**Joyce Hedrick, Lansdale, Pa.,** received an M.Div. degree from Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in May. She is a member of Plains Mennonite Church, where she completed an internship.

The 7th Annual **Women in Ministry Conference** will be held May 3-6 1984 in Harrisonburg, VA. The theme will be "In the Image of God." The program committee invites interested persons to submit proposals for workshops by Sept. 14, 1983. Those selected will be notified by Nov. 1983.

Workshops are especially desired in the following areas: counselling and sex roles, basic issues on women in leadership roles, counselling for specific populations, church leadership resourcing, women in the arts, spirituality, specialized ministries, and mentors and models.

Individuals or teams interested in leading a workshop should submit info to **Margaret Foth, 1251 Virginia Ave., Harrisonburg, VA 22801.** Include 1) name of workshop, 2) outline of workshop, 3) length desired (1 or 2 hours), and 4) biographical sketch about workshop leader.

On April 18 **Mary Sprunger-Froese** and **Patricia McCormick** were fined \$500 (suspended if they do not break the law for two years) for their prayer witness at the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant on Ash Wednesday (see item in March-April Report). On May 13 **Esther Kisamore** and **Marge Roberts** were sentenced for their March 28 action of attempting to plant a dogwood tree on Rocky Flats property. **Marge** was fined \$1,000; **Esther** was given a suspended fine of \$500. In both trials, the women were grateful for the opportunity to give a peace witness via their prepared courtroom statements.

**Mary Jane Hershey, Salford Mennonite Church,** gave a keynote address at the May 7 Franconia Mennonite

Conference meeting. **Ruth Stoy** responded to the presentation. The topic for both messages was "Continuing in the Fellowship of Christ."

Theme for the 1983 Women's Week October 12-14 at Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, Texas is "Peace and Justice are Women's Issues." Speakers will be **Rena Karefa-Smart** and **Rosalie Bertell.**

A joint Women in Mission and WMSC program is one of the events scheduled during Bethlehem '83, the General Conference and Mennonite Church assembly August 1-7 in Bethlehem, Pa. The program is scheduled for Wednesday, August 3 from 5:45 to 6:45 p.m. On Friday noon, an informal luncheon will be held with representatives of various women's groups and committees on women's issues. This will be a time of sharing about each other's activities and discussing involvement of women in Mennonite World Conference in 1984. Various workshops throughout the week will deal with issues related to women, and women's groups will have booths in the display area.

Adjunct to the conference, WOMENSAGE has rented Godfrey Daniel's Coffee House, 7 East 4th Street, Bethlehem, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each weekday. The intent is to provide a place for feminist women to meet and talk. Food will be available; focused discussions which continue or supplement topics from the conference will be scheduled at various times.

**Nancy Heisey Longacre** has compiled a Brethren in Christ Women's Resource Listing including names and info on 32 women from the U.S. and Canada. For a copy, contact Nancy at 724 Fulton St., Akron, PA 17501.

Women peacemakers have organized a Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice, located near the Seneca Army Depot in upstate New York. The camp will be open from July 4 until August 31. The Seneca Army Depot, a Native American homeland once nurtured by the Iroquois, is now the storage site for the neutron bomb and most likely the Pershing II missile, and is the departure point for weapons to be deployed in Europe. Women are gathering at the peace camp to stop the deployment of these weapons. The first two weeks of August will be a special time for focusing on the "spirituality of peacemaking as women" through spiritual celebrations, denominational caucuses, artistic expressions, prayer and Bible study, political action, exploration of gifts, meditation and silence. Women may send or bring candles and bags of earth. For more info contact: **Mary Zepernick, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1213 Race St., Philadelphia, PA 19107 (215) 563-7110.**

**Margaret Devadason** and **Cynthia Peacock, MCC workers in Calcutta, India,** served as resource people at a two-day seminar on "The Role of Women in Development." They used Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the biblical character of Esther, and other examples to illustrate the importance and value of women leaders. Thirty-eight women from 13 villages attended.

**Aggie Klassen, Haviland, Kans.,** has authored a book **Dear Aggie: Letters from Prison,** published in 1982 by Mennonite Press, N. Newton, Kans.

*continued on page 11*

## Letter

Your *Report #44* on sexuality (July-August 1982) did not deal with questions faced by today's college women. Therefore I would like to make some observations on this topic.

College women face four basic lifestyle questions today: 1) To marry? 2) Not to marry? 3) To give first priority to a career? 4) To be sexually active?

These questions have of course concerned college-age women of previous generations. The issue of interest is the answers of present college-age women. Has there been a change in the behavior of Mennonite women regarding these questions?

To my knowledge there are no research data on all Mennonite college women's behavior, either past or present. These comments, then, will be largely impressionistic and descriptive.

The Women's Movement appears to be having an impact on the questions some women are asking about marriage. Perhaps the majority of Mennonite women still see a traditional marriage as desirable—a marriage with child-rearing responsibilities as a first priority.

A growing number of women, however, are asking questions about a self-fulfilling career as a priority even if they marry. These women do not see the traditional devotion to husband and children as fulfilling. They are seeking partners who will share child-rearing tasks, men who will permit involvement in choices of where they will live as a family, etc. These women are finding that many Mennonite young men are still socialized to want to marry a more traditional woman.

In the face of this conflict of interest, the young woman is in a very difficult dilemma. She may wish marriage, but she cannot be true to herself and enter into such an unequal yoke. Anger and depression are common responses to this dilemma.

Some women deny the problem and opt for marriage. Some women marry, intending to force changes once the knot is tied. Some women decide the cost in self-esteem is too high and postpone marriage, knowing this may well result in their remaining single. Some are able to help the man move to accepting greater equality in their relationship.

Parenthetically, the issue of women's normal developmental patterns needs to be addressed. Erikson's description of developmental stages has strongly influenced our understanding of the tasks of adolescence and young adulthood. He describes the process very well—for men. New information growing out of women's studies is casting serious doubt on how applicable this sequence is for women. Early marriage appears to bring premature closure to women's developmental pattern. Too late women suddenly realize they do not yet know who they are in their own right.

Sexual activity outside of marriage is not new to this generation. (Women students who suddenly dropped

out of school or hastily arranged marriages seem proof of that kind of behavior back in the '40's and '50's.)

While many sexually active women use contraceptives, a few each year find themselves pregnant, not by plan. Marriage, placement of the child for adoption, a plan to keep the child and remain single, and abortion are all choices made by these individual young women. Some women students reveal that they had an abortion while in high school.

Sexual orientation and lifestyle is an issue for a number of young women. Some of them raise the question of same-sex preference as part of a young adult's development. Others are very clear that theirs is a continuing same-sex preference. These women usually describe traumatic unsuccessful attempts to be interested in heterosexual dating during high school. Most of these women have not been able to talk openly with anyone about the concerns, questions and lifestyle issues a same-sex orientation forces.

Sexual abuse is not unknown to Mennonite campus women. An anonymous survey listed the following responses: "I have personally experienced:"

- 3 rape
- 3 incest
- 34 knowing a friend or relative who has been raped
- 17 knowing a friend or relative who has experienced incest

Mennonite college-age women are dealing with issues of sexuality, sexual behavior, and sexual discrimination and abuse. Are we being helpful to them as they deal with these issues?

Students report that peers are the most influential in arriving at decisions. Students also report that parents frequently have not given them information and guidance in sexual matters. Can college classes, personnel and faculty be helpful, or are the college years already too late for significant attitude formation and behavioral decision-making?—*Anna Bowman, professor of social work, Goshen College*

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*continued*

### **New Women's Studies Minor at Goshen**

The newest academic program at Goshen College has grown out of students' interest in issues related to the women's movement. An interdisciplinary minor in Women's Studies approved this year by the faculty, is now available to students through the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology.

The formation of the minor grew out of two popular courses, *Womanhood in America* and *Contemporary Women's Issues*, and the organization three years ago of the Goshen Student Women's Association. Behind the desire for the Women's Studies minor, explained associate professor of social work Anna Bowman, is concern about both the inadequate number of female faculty role models and the traditional male bias in most college courses.—*Goshen College Bulletin*

The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns gathered at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kans. for its semi-annual meeting, April 20. Clarification of relations with the MCC peace committees and conference groups dealing with women's issues consumed a major portion of the agenda.

Initiatives on women's issues at the conference level have increased significantly in the past few years. The CWC hopes to facilitate information sharing on an inter-Mennonite basis on current happenings. CWC members agreed to take steps to strengthen Canadian involvement by nominating a CWC member to serve on the Peace & Social Concerns Committee and by encouraging MCC Canada to consider part-time staffing for women's concerns in the Winnipeg office.

The committee approved a change in its membership policy to allow members to serve 2 terms, rather than limiting members to serve one 3-year term. It was felt that continual membership turnover has hampered the committee's effectiveness.

Members discussed their efforts to increase the involvement of women and to have women's issues addressed in various ways at the Bethlehem '83 joint Mennonite Church-General Conference assembly and at Mennonite World Conference (1984).

**Barbara Kauffman**, Kalispell, Montana, is teaching at Sana's International School in Yemen, under the auspices of Mennonite Board of Missions. Prior to her current assignment, Barbara worked for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in Madison, Wisconsin, for four years.

**Jan Lugibihl**, Elkhart, Ind. is beginning a 2-year term as the Committee on Women's Concerns representative on MCC U.S. Peace Section.

**Francie Eash**, Goshen, Ind. begins a 3-year term as member-at-large on MCC U.S. Peace Section.

## MWC Travel Fund for Third World Women

Women in Mission (General Conference) is sponsoring a travel fund for Third World women to attend Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg France in 1984. Please send contributions (any amount welcome!) to: Women in Mission, Box 347, Newton, Kansas 67114. Make checks payable to **Women in Mission**, designated for **Third World Women to Mennonite World Conference**. Contributions will be funneled to the Mennonite World Conference office, which will select recipients. The Committee on Women's Concerns urges persons to contribute to the Women in Mission fund, since we will not have a fund of our own this time. Thank you!

If you have news and verbs that you would like to share with the other 2,000 readers of *Report*, send them to Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5G5 Canada.

Forthcoming *Reports* will focus on:

Sept.-Oct. 1983 Women and Non-traditional Churches

Nov.-Dec. 1983 Women and Aging

Jan.-Feb. 1984 Women and Home Missions

March-Apr. 1984 Women and Third World Development

May-June 1984 Impact of Childbearing/Childlessness on Women's Lives

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The *REPORT* is published bi-monthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. It strives to promote this belief through sharing information, concerns and ideas relating to problems and issues which affect the status of women in church and society. Correspondence should be addressed to Editor Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5G5 Canada.

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